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SUMMER / 2018 / FREE



UNDERWATER KRISTINE KENNEDY / **COAL** SARA GRAYBEAL / **CUT AND DRY** AMANDA AUBLE

CONTENTS

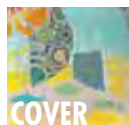
FEATURES

- 3** UNDERWATER (fiction).....KRISTINE KENNEDY
10 COAL (fiction).....SARA GRAYBEAL
20 CUT AND DRY (fiction).....AMANDA AUBLE
24 TRAIL OF GHOSTS (non-fiction).....DEVON JAMES
28 THE WRITING PROMPT.....AIMEE LABRIE

POETRY

- 8** TIDINGS.....THEODORE EISENBERG
9 SIFT.....AMY ELIZABETH ROBINSON
14 HOME-MADE GODS.....CLAIRE SCOTT
14 MADE UP SAINTS.....CLAIRE SCOTT
16 FIELD STUDY.....CHARLES S. CARR
18 EVENSONG, KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL.....PETER MCELLHENNEY

ART



Light of Morning by Linda Dubin Garfield

Linda Dubin Garfield, an award-winning printmaker and mixed media artist, creates visual memoirs exploring the mystery of memory and the magic of place, using hand-pulled printmaking techniques, photography, collage and digital imaging. Garfield is founder of ARTsisters, a professional artists' group which empowers artists and their community. She also founded smART business consulting which aids emerging artists. Garfield serves on several non-profit boards, including The Da Vinci Art Alliance for whom she serves as president. Visit www.lindadubingarfield.com



Ebb and Flow I by Linda Dubin Garfield



Blooming by Clara Soyoun Kim

Clara Soyoun Kim is a painter living and working in Philadelphia. For her entire life, she has had two key passions: art and nature. She majored in landscape architecture in college in Korea. However, it didn't satisfy her expressive yearning, so she came to America to study painting. Kim earned her BFA at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She has had several solo shows and is a member of many professional art organizations; she also takes part in many group shows. Visit www.clarapainting.com



Attic Interior by Peter Smyth

Peter Smyth is an artist who attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts while working the night shift as a train mechanic. He is a painter, photographer, songwriter, and published writer who is currently working on a collection of autobiographical essays on art. His work which has received numerous awards, is exclusively monochrome, narrative in nature and attempts to capture an eerie or disquieting mood. Visit: petersmythfinearts.com



I See You by Thomas Tustin

Thomas Tustin is an artist based in Philadelphia. While working predominantly in oils, his art explores the themes of fantasy, reality, and identity. His work has been featured across Philadelphia in various group and solo exhibitions. www.thomastustin.com



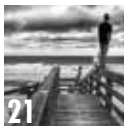
Blue in Green by George McClements

George McClements grew up in and around Philadelphia. A graduate of The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, McClements' art is an homage to Jazz and Blues musicians. Through his work, McClements aims for music to take on physical colors; his canvas a manuscript on which the notes are painted. His vision is to create a world in color as Thelonious Monk created a world of sound.



Laundry Day by Radhika Srinivas

Professional watercolor artist Radhika Srinivas earned her fine arts degree in India and has a background in textile design. Srinivas draws inspiration from travel around the world and from Chester County where she resides and maintains a studio. Watercolor is her medium of choice. Her work has received numerous awards in both local and national level exhibitions. www.radhikasrinivas.com



The Looming by Rob Lybeck

Rob Lybeck is a Center City Philadelphia photographer with a large, twenty-plus year collection of work concentrating on the city's built environment, B&W street documentary, architectural details, cityscapes as well as land/seascapes. Lybeck is a member of the Da Vinci Art Alliance in Philadelphia.

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Underwater

Kristine Kennedy

We sit in a semi-circle booth at Max's Ultimate Sports Bar, nibbling out of obligation on hot poppers and fried mozzarella, silently absorbing the familiar comforts of a chain restaurant. Our eyes emptily follow unremarkable images on the muted, 52" plasma television. We wait. A commercial for a deceptively low mortgage rate segues into this segment of the evening's national news: a brick and beige vinyl-sided 1986 raised ranch being sucked away by a violent body of water. The bulletin below: FLOOD WIPES OUT HUNDREDS OF HOMES IN IOWA. Then—a penetrating yowl, unmistakably that of my fourteen-year-old daughter Kelly, followed by a boy's voice—*"Isn't that our house?"*

I carefully examine the details of the house on the screen as they loop the footage. Two-car garage on the left. Brown shutters, one missing on the right side of the upper left window. Weather-vane that always pointed south because it was never oiled. Large, listing pine tree at the end of the submerged driveway. Undoubtedly our house.

Kelly struggles to catch a breath. My husband Matt turns a pale marble color as he becomes utterly motionless, his eyeballs locked on the television, but his gaze focused far beyond it into either his past or his future. I look to our son Nick. He does not notice the ice cube falling from his agape mouth just before he utters, "Holy shit."

Already, I only vaguely remember that house, the one we lived in until just three days ago. It was not our first. But, it may very well be our last. The kitchen was always sticky. The living room carpet was stained and embarrassing. The hot water heater struggled to make my showers tepid. I do not miss any of it. As I watch it wash away, the leaden weight of home ownership lifts from my aching body. I smirk and look off into nowhere, my eyes defocusing, and allow myself to envision a whitewashed condo with new bamboo floors—a rental in the city near a park.

"Yup," I reply, stuffing my mouth with salty, yet flavorless fried food. Matt looks to me, jaw slightly dropped. It takes him a moment to move from shock to surprise to anger. I guess he expects me to cry; to show the children that I share their sorrow, to show him that I comprehend the gravity our enormous loss. Perhaps I am expected to give a rousing speech about how God has a plan for us. God's plans are hilarious. I want to laugh out loud they are so funny, but refrain so that Matt does not think I am laughing at him.

It briefly occurs to me—this could be the flood that saves our

marriage. It could prove our mettle, unfurl our courage. It could be the only test we ever pass. But instead, the man I married cries. They all cry: father, daughter, son—immediately missing the minutiae of their lives in that cookie-cutter plywood box. I can see it all in extreme detail: dirty, abused dolls; broken skate boards; piles of game consoles; a new red lawnmower that he can ride like a cowboy; photos of those always over-remembered happier times. It's sordid and unholy.

I order another beer. And a shot of Jim Beam. The news repeats that footage of our house being demolished over and over, sending my nuclear family into a state of inaudible terror. As we sit among the unaffected, dissolving like flesh in a bath of acid, I can feel the intact families nearby pick up the scent of our infection. No one wants to be near an unraveling person, no less four of them. A mother across the aisle looks to me with a mix of confusion and contempt. *Keep it together, woman* I can hear her say in my head. It's a mean voice. A god-like voice.

I used to believe that a disaster was a large and public event. The Titanic. The Great Fire. A tornado. A flood, such as the one that just gutted my life. But, I have come to see that most disasters are aggregate and private. They are the product of slow erosion that no one else can see, like when you stand in the ocean and the sand washes away from under your feet, a little more with each retracting wave, until you cannot balance anymore. Eventually, if you stay in the same place long enough, you fall. The other people on the beach, reading their summer novels and slowly tanning? They don't feel your panic. They don't even realize there is a problem because it is not their problem. This is the way life works.

I want to tell them that it's not worth crying over. That house wasn't so great. Those things weren't so great. We are free now. Now, we can be who we want to be. We can live in a tent. We can eat French fries every night and wash them down with beer and whiskey. Nothing really matters. I don't have the heart to tell them this as they sob into their trivia-covered place mats, looking deep into the spiral maze meant to busy children so the adults can talk. I put back my shot and look one more time at our \$284,599 house washing away before they cut to commercial.

"Well, there's the insurance," Matt blubbers, "But that probably won't cover it. We were upside down..."

Kelly asks weakly, "What's that mean?" I think that it is best not to explain.

"Matt, is your phone is working?" I ask. He pulls out his cell phone, rubs it on his shirt and holds down a button. "Looks like it," he says. "Three messages." Matt pulls the phone to his ear, covering the free ear with a quivering, cupped hand. The kids look to nowhere, dejected. I need to act fast.

"At least Six Flags was spared. Bet it will be empty tomorrow." They look to me with disgust. I stifle a giggle while hailing the waitress for another Beam.

Before the rain began four days ago, I'd already had a terrible morning. I had still not gotten my period and a wicked headache prevented me from getting out of bed until after eleven. Just as the pain subsided, the mail came. Amidst a stack of credit card offers, I found a letter notifying us that we were behind on our property taxes and there would be a sheriff's sale. Then the phone rang. I let it go to voicemail because I knew the caller would say, "Thank you for applying for the job. We have hired someone else. Good luck with your next endeavor." At least they called. That was nice. I sat on the porch and watched the downpour. They said that it would be a lot of rain, that it might flood, and I hoped that I would be washed away.

We went to bed to the pounding sounds of a vindictive, unhinged sky. Matt fell into a deep sleep so suddenly, I wondered if he had overdosed. But I remained awake, rattled by the violent storm. I imagined it to be a woman, like myself, wanting to destroy everything she touched, and riding high on the endorphin-soaked rush of doing just that. But I was not the storm. I was a middle-aged woman without a job. I was beaten and discarded, awash in indecision and panic. I would never be a storm. I would only ever be a house.

Sometime past two I drifted into a dream where I was floating down a slow, winding river on the roof of our mini-van. The kids' stuffed toys were floating past, clinging to one another for dear life, groveling for help. Then something soft, like paws, grabbed my ankles and pulled me down into the murkiness. It was warm down below, in the muddy morass. Comforting. Silent. I wanted to stay there forever. But an alarming sound woke me up. The sound of water lapping. I was damp. The water had wicked up the sheets and I realized the flood was worse than they predicted. Our room was on the second floor.

The shot on TV, the one where our under-appraised house floats away with a silent rush, doesn't show us being rescued by the man in the rowboat. No, at the moment when that lucky cameraman caught our lives dissolving like a sugar cube, we were in a gymnasium, fifty miles away, sipping instant coffee in other people's dry clothes, listening to word-of-mouth reports, unaware that the destruction of which they spoke was our own. Now we know.

"They're coming to pick us up. I'm gonna call and let them know where we are," Matt relays. The kids perk up. Matt dials, and puts the phone back to his ear, looking at me with the grin of a man on the verge of control. He cups his hands again, burying his head almost under the table. The restaurant isn't even that loud, but I try not to judge.

"When can we move back?" asks Nick. I ignore him. Matt argues with his mother, probably about directions. Kelly finally answers, "Dipshit- did you see our house? *It's gone.*" I always admired her directness.

Nick looks at me, a selfish sadness draining the color from his pimply face. "Mom," he begins, "Where are we going to live?"

Kelly turns her attention to me now. She is waiting for me to fail to answer his question. Nick continues, "What's going to happen now? We're homeless. And you don't even have a job." This statement pushes me further down in the pleather banquette and a constriction of my throat makes it difficult to swallow my beer. It's like I always suspected. They want me to drown with them.

Sabrina, our effervescent waitress, comes over to check on us. Her smile fades when she sees our long, wet, faces. "C-can I get you guys anything else?"

"I'll have another beer," I chime.

"No she won't" Matt interjects.

I look into Sabrina's hazel eyes, dipped in sparkly mascara and outlined in shadow the color of a perfect day. "I would love a Budweiser this time," I say with a broad, reassuring grin. "Sure," she smiles back, "I'll be right over with that." And she is gone. I look back to the television. They have moved on to celebrity gossip. The tall one has left the blonde one for the brunette, who just shaved her head and is pregnant. I can relate.

"We'd all like to tie one on right now, Meg," Matt spits. The kids look away, nowhere to go.

"I'll buy them a beer. Put it in a paper cup--"

"This is no time to be like this," he steams. I want to tell him that the liquor makes this situation tolerable while also mitigating the nausea. So, in fact, I do have to be like this. "Seriously. Grow the f—grow up, Meg. We just lost everything. *Everything.*"

I haven't a retort. We have lost everything. I stand. "Don't drink my beer kids. Mommy will be right back," I say and then stumble to the bathroom.

I am relieved to find that it is one of those rest rooms where you can lock yourself in, alone. Quiet. Privacy. I check for a window, but am disappointed. Can't escape from here. Can't escape. I start to sweat. The smell of the bathroom- urine mixed with bleach and a strawberry scented soap- makes me sick. I turn, bow, and vomit the unmistakable symptom. Now I know. I am drowning.

I wonder what it will be like. Will it have Down's syndrome? I am 44. Will it be pale enough to pass? How much does an abortion cost? Do they take credit cards? A *knock at the door*. I rinse off my face. The woman on the other side of the door is large. Her hair is wet. She pushes past me without looking at me, saying only, "Jesus. It stinks in here."

Now devoid of hot poppers and booze, I am disappointed to see that Sabrina has cleared the table and Matt has taken over my beer. He maintains a stern gaze over me as he puts it back. The kids try not to look.

"Grams will be here in an hour, mom," Kelly informs me.

"If she doesn't get lost," Nick adds before blowing his bangs out of his face.

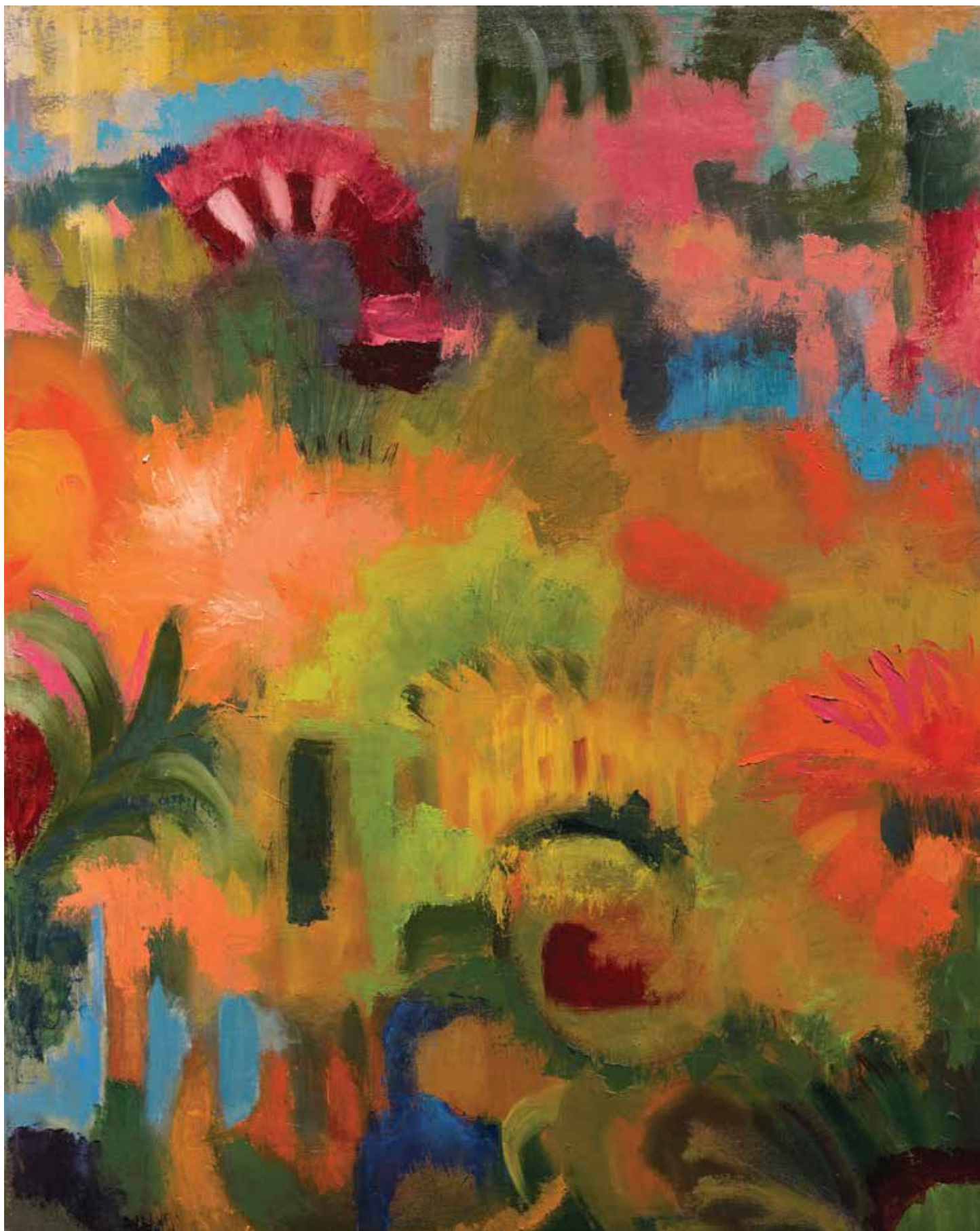
I wish I had my cell phone. I want to call him, to let him know what we have done. I wonder if he has tried to call me...if he worries about me. But that phone with his number washed away with all the other numbers, all the baby albums, all the symbols of normalcy and responsibility. They are in the Mississippi by now.

"Where will we go to school?" Kelly asks in a new round of tears.

"We'll get an apartment in the same district. No disruptions," Matt answers definitively.

"An apartment?" Kelly sneers, "I'm not living in an apartment. Poor people live in apartments."

Matt and I look to one another. In those shallow green-grey



eyes, eyes that the baby will not have, I see surrender. I see a grave of credit cards and back taxes. I see a fifteen hundred dollar lawnmower chewing up a lawn of cash. I see anti-freeze evaporating from ATMs on fatherless Friday nights. I see a family photo degrading in a pool of indifferent rain. I see waves of a silty ocean pulling me under, sucking me into a saline sac of fluid, keeping me safe until my momma welcomes me with single mother arms.

Mother. Mommy. Momma.

"Mom," Nick pokes me.

"What?"

"You're spacing, dude."

"I'm tired."

"You're drunk," Matt says.

"Dad, leave her alone," Kelly snaps.

Dinner together at Max's is exactly as I remember it was at home. Four different diners in four different spaces. At least I can say I tried. I tried AA, too. That's where I met Charlie. I had gone for the kids' sake. But, when they didn't seem to notice the difference, I pursued something selfish. I found a man who was also looking for a reason to stop trying. We had fantastic sex a dozen or so times. Then, he stopped coming to the meetings. He stopped calling. Maybe his wife found out. I wonder if he has changed his number.

Sabrina slides the check toward Matt. When she is gone, he slides it toward me, saying, "This one is all you, champ." It's funny for obvious reasons. I pull out a credit card. He says, "Not the joint one. It's frozen." I glare, bothered, but not surprised, into that swollen middle management face and pull out another card. I apologize to the kids for all the adulthood they have to witness.

Sabrina pauses before the television above us. The image is now of a highway awash with windswept water. "Shit!" she unwittingly utters, "How am I gonna get to my boyfriend's?"

Matt, recognizing the stretch of road, also lets out a profanity. I laugh. I really am drunk. He whips out his cell phone and dials up Mother-in Law. "Ma... ma... the Interstate is flooded. You can't get through."

News that Mother-in Law will not be able to rescue us from one another is a huge relief. She's a stupid woman with stupid convictions, though I would have loved to tell her. It would have killed her to hear that a black man knocked up her son's wife. And it was consensual. She would not believe that.

Kelly cries harder. I don't see why. But, I wish she would stop. It's beginning to annoy me. She's got her whole life to buy more clothes and take more pictures and accumulate the trash of human existence. Why she is so attached to one poorly built raised ranch and a pile of scratched CD's, I don't understand. There is so much about her that I don't understand. I find myself staring at her, getting lost in her hair, so straight and pale that it seems like a wig put on for a fashion show. She notices, winces, says, "What? Like you'd understand."

When they are babies, we know everything about them: every fold of skin, every wisp of hair, every budding tooth. We know what they like to eat, what they can't eat, what could kill them. Now, I don't know anything. I look at Kelly and I realize that I don't know when she gets her period. I should. But, I don't. I wonder if she's ever been pregnant. She's fourteen. It could happen. I start crying. I can't help it. I look at my sad family, full of useless food

and shattering into four sharp pieces, and I can't stop. I don't understand why we have children. All we do is ruin them.

Nick puts his arm around me and says, "We'll build a new house, mom. Right where the old one was." I laugh. That house was the only house. Those things were the only things. There is nothing more for them. There is no prom gown. There is no summer vacation. There is no college fund. They will hate us. They may never forgive us. They will think of me as stupid and selfish and they are right. When I am old, they will put me in a home and not visit me. They will not name their children after me.

I stand up, slightly off-balance. I look around the restaurant. People are eating quietly under smiling Mickey Mantles and slam-dunking Larry Birds. Parents and children, grandparents and babies, teenagers and elderly folks in wheelchairs- they don't feel it. They don't feel the sand being sucked from under my feet. They are still in their beach chairs, enjoying their sunny day.

I walk to the door and out into the misty night. I walk into the parking lot. Dozens of new cars silently wait for their contented owners, the mist collecting into heavy drops on the windshields. I look back. No one is coming for me. My gait quickens.

I move towards the truck stop next door. It is an island of brightness. Shiny cabs with chrome stacks beckon me. I jog. Behind me, the crackling call of my daughter, asking me where I am going. I run. Kelly, younger and fitter, catches up with me. She grabs my wrist and tries to drag me to a halt.

"Stop! Stop! Mom- where are you going? You can't run away. You can't just leave!" Tears mix with the mist on her young, flushed cheeks.

I turn to her, admiring her smooth face, devoid of wrinkles, puffy like a cherub. I look into her small brown eyes, perfect without makeup, and say, "Kelly. I'm pregnant."

She is puzzled. "Oh. Okay."

"It's not okay. It's not your father's."

She stands, stunned. She stops crying and wipes her cheeks with the cuff of her sweatshirt. "Whose is it?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does."

"Some guy I met at AA. It's going to be really obvious it's not your father's. I really fucked up."

She takes a minute to collect, looking to the damp ground for some pattern of logic. "It's okay," she says, nodding, "We'll take care of it. We'll... my friends all go to Planned Parenthood. It's like, three hundred bucks. I've got three fifty in my savings account. You can have it. I'll make up some bullshit excuse for dad and we'll go tomorrow. He'll never have to know." She looks dead into my eyes. "He doesn't ever have to know. We can fix this."

She slowly wraps her arms around me, laying her head in between my ear and my collarbone, and I realize suddenly how cold I had been. In her warm, soft strangle hold, I can tell that she knows that there is no prom dress. She knows that there is no Myrtle Beach. She knows that the iPod is gone. The television is gone. The dollhouse I made for her eighth birthday is gone. The pictures, the good times, all underwater.

Kristine Kennedy was recently named a semi-finalist for *Ruminate Magazine's* Van Dyke Short Story Prize. She has won the Set in Philadelphia Regional Writer Award and been a quarterfinalist for the Academy of Motion Pictures' Nicholls Fellowship. She has written for the Ritz Filmbill, *Philebrity* and *WHYY's* arts and culture blog. Kristine lives in Philadelphia and works for an ad agency.



Tidings

Poem by Theodore Eisenberg

I understand why the shore line
is uncertain; why castles are sand.
Gulls carry the harbor and drop
it past buoys, as if bread had
fallen from their mouths.

A reckless hermit crab
navigates across a blanket.
A life guard judges, and
with evening, combs beach
for what is stranger.

When sea floats and sky
heralds concerts on a jutting
pier. How waves receive news
within percussion. Where a local
band adumbrates to the sea.

We undress for the sun;
at night regretting ourselves,
embraced by dark space, by
fumbling hands, in legs. A sea
breeze, cogent as undertow.



Theodore Eisenberg retired from the practice of labor law in 2014 to write every day. His poems have appeared, or will soon appear, in *The Listening Eye*, *The Aurean*, *Poetica*, *Thema*, *Rattle*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Slipstream Press*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, *Crosswinds Press*, *concis*, *Main Street Rag* and *Ragged Sky Anthology*. His chapbook, *This*, was published in 2017 by Finishing Line Press. His poems are what becomes “this” for him – fragments received within the circle of his intimacy.

Sift

Poem by Amy Elizabeth Robinson

For Southeast Philly

The fragile bones.
The highway snaking
through the maze of rigs.
Refinery
towers rising
and belching invisible
stink into your ovaries
ripe with coming
sickness and perhaps
forbidden or forgotten
desire. The pinched lips.
The dusky pink
carpet stretched out behind glass latched doors.
The elevator narrow
and smoky and closing and rising and releasing
us to more dusky pink,
more stretches of beige to your tall beige door.
Inside,
glass cabinets filled
with plates, tea cups, silver
spoons, leprechauns, Matryoshka
dolls, sheltered from the dust of
what? Of concrete
lots stretching to the edge of the Delaware?
The unspoken legacy of unspoken things,
sifted. The not speaking.
The ladyfingers spongy
under the roofs of our mouths.
Our mouths too full
of sweet things
to ask questions. Still.



Amy Elizabeth Robinson is a poet, historian, and many other things living in the hills of Sonoma County, California. She grew up in the western suburbs of Philadelphia, spent summer vacations in Cape May and Cape May Point, and also went to college in New Jersey. She holds degrees in history from Princeton, University College London, and Stanford, and studies Zen and creativity with the Pacific Zen Institute. She is a Contributing Editor of PZI's online magazine of Zen and the arts, *Uncertainty Club*, and her work has also appeared in *Deluge*, *Literary Mama*, *West Trestle Review*, *DASH*, *Vine Leaves*, and as part of *Rattle's* innovative Poets Respond program.



Coal

Sara Graybeal

Ángel works at a print shop, casting logos onto sweatshirts, white letters on black tees. TGIF. LONG HAIR DON'T CARE. YOLO. KEEP CALM AND...

He's been in hiding from pop culture for a while and this is a crash course he feels unprepared for. "Get back on Facebook," his sister recommends, but Ángel enjoys the mystery. WORK WORK WORK WORK WORK. I GOT HOT SAUCE IN MY BAG, SWAG.

He sometimes gets orders from organizations on shoestring budgets, asking for five hundred shirts by the end of the week. "C'mon, buddy, it's for the cause." Though his boss discourages it, Ángel does his best to meet these last-minute deadlines, stenciling RAISE MINIMUM WAGE and NINGÚN SER HUMANO ES ILEGAL late into the night. It's a strange, satisfying loneliness: fluorescent bulbs, sweat pouring down his chest, shirts hot-tumbling into boxes. The dark parking lot outside occupied only by his bike, a Suzuki Supermoto with chipping yellow paint. At the edge of the pavement, crickets. And beyond them, the bright snake of highway where cars roar in and out of Philadelphia.

Occasionally there is a different kind of order to fill: ALL LIVES MATTER, BUILD THE WALL. He worries, pushing paint across the screen. This is how it feels to be a cog in the wheel. A slave to capitalism. The chemistry post-doc who plodded wearily toward the creation of the atom bomb. Who can predict with what hatred these shirts will be worn, what anger they will incite? Who can predict who will shoot, who will die?

His bike has a broken rearview mirror, but after orders like these he takes the highway anyway, revving up to eighty, ninety. He keeps his shirt on so as not to attract attention from cops, though he'd like to feel the wind on his skin, sweat droplets flying, a cartoon shower of sparks behind him as he burns up the pavement toward home. He stops before he hits a hundred despite his clawing adrenaline, his muscles' ache for higher speeds. It's a promise, made to his mother back when she caught him racing. He tried to explain the necessity to her: it's not about winning. It's about driving his body to the burning core of its capabilities, a place of nerve and smoke where one thing snaps and he's dead. Seeing himself, from that place, reborn again and again.

She didn't understand. "I don't want you reborn. I want you alive. Promise me."

He did. It's been ten long years since then.

At home, early mornings, his mother serves him last night's dinner with coffee. His sister sings along with Beyoncé, getting

ready for work, and his daughter Mariángel knocks on the door. Her mother brings her by every morning on the way to kindergarten for a kiss, which is allowed, and a sip of coffee, which is a secret, dark and sweet, gulped just inside the front door. Then Ángel says, "See you later, mi reina," and sinks onto the couch and sleeps, until the alarm goes off and it's time to get back to the shop.

On sunny days he plays old salsa, Hector Lavoe and Jerry Rivera. "This is some music," his boss says, smoking and tallying up numbers at his desk while Ángel leans over the Spider, a metal stand with six hands, one for each colored screen. He makes ten pink bridesmaids' shirts: I WOKE UP LIKE THIS. Then thirty cheerleading practice shirts: FLAWLESS. "Do girls listen to anyone besides Beyoncé?" Ángel wonders out loud.

"Huh?" says his boss, then shrugs. "Hey, you got me."

Fall is coming and they're printing logos on Varsity jackets, blue onto red onto yellow, the colors sinking perfectly in place. Like sculpting a sunset. He wishes Mariángel could see. She likes pastels and watercolors already; "definitely your baby," his mother says, taping up pictures of flowers and rainbows.

But not all the orders are colorful. #ERICGARNER. #FREDDIEGRAY. He has started predicting it by the tone of the caller, a brittle focus, an almost-deadened attention to detail. "The name has to be spelled right," the callers say. "Please make sure the name is spelled right."

He doesn't tell them that, Facebook or none, he knows how to spell these names. He doesn't tell them they're speaking to Ángel, who once marched beside them, Ángel, who stretched out in the Vine Street Expressway, stopping traffic to demand justice. The organizers waited for him to reappear once word got out he'd come home from jail, in the same way his neighbors waited for him to sit back down on his mom's steps and put a little money in their pockets. He hasn't done either of those things. He hasn't even gone back to doing tattoos. He took a job at the print shop because he thought it would be simple, far from the drama, a little like art, and sometimes it is all those things, and sometimes it is none. When the activists come to pick up their shirts, they do a double take. "My man. Where've you been?"

"Around," he says, shaking his head in a half-guilty, half-dogged way. They give him fliers and new numbers. They say they'll look for him at the next rally. He says he'll be there, but he won't. The rallies are where the cops first spotted him. A few



trips to his block, a couple tapped phone calls, and that was that. Targeted for politics, arrested for weed. He's abandoned them both for good measure.

The world is an earthquake. He's keeping himself far from the epicenter.

But the orders keep coming. The worst are the calls for fifty white tees, always the same thing, a loved one shot, a grainy photo, a cursive *RIP*. He can see these women, heads bent over cell phones in dark living rooms, voices layered tremor upon tremor. He wishes there was a better thing to say than, "Yes, ma'am, I can do that for you." A greater reassurance than, "It'll be ready by tomorrow." He says nothing sympathetic or inviting. The women weep anyway.

In October a customer comes in, bell tinkling, a gust of smoky autumn air. Ángel is six months free and still breathless at old smells, his mother's quiet smile, the things he hadn't known he could lose so fully until he did.

"Our order with someone else fell through," the woman says. "You come recommended. We're marching this Saturday. We need three thousand shirts with an assortment of hashtags. What do you think?"

Ángel looks around the shop. His boss is out for the day. "I can't do it," he says. It's like standing at the top of a chorsing waterfall, deciding not to jump. His arms slacken with disappointment. "I'm supposed to cut back on my overtime."

"Oh," she says. He avoids her eyes. In the old days, let a mother come to his door saying her kids were hungry, a friend whose brother needed bail. A family in deportation court without a lawyer. Whatever it was, Ángel would come up with it; he'd come up with it and if he couldn't, he'd march. He'd lie down in the street.

Once, growing up in Puerto Rico, his brother had cut himself in the leg with a machete. Ángel can still see it: green vines closing in, his brother's terror, the helpless flap of skin, blood billowing out. Ángel had screamed for help. He'd stripped off his shirt and knotted it around his brother's leg, but when even this soaked red and no one came, he turned the machete against himself. He didn't know why. Did he think it would solve the problem, his mother demanded later, and he said no. It was just what his hands did, in that sickening moment of stillness.

His father had set a hand on his back. "When the world bleeds, Ángel bleeds," he'd said to Ángel's mother. "Can't you see?"

His father is gone now, and his brother, and all that blood, and even the scar, replaced by muscle and exhaust pipe burns and the tiniest nick of a bullet and then nothing at all. "It's not about other people anymore," his P.O. says. "It's about Ángel now."

But who is Ángel, if not the person he's always been? Who else can he possibly be?

"We'll figure something out," the customer says, giving him an undeserved smile.

He tries to smile back. Late afternoon sun pours through the windows, igniting the cardboard boxes orange. The Spider watches like a pit-bull, awaiting his command.

"I got you," he tells the woman. "Don't worry. They'll be ready by Friday."

"What's wrong with your hands?" his boss asks. "Are those blisters?"

Ángel says they're mosquito bites. "Too much sitting outside."

His boss whistles. "In November? Hey. Have you been here all night? Go home and get some sleep."

No, he hasn't been here all night. And he's an insomniac, doesn't need sleep. The lies come easily.

In truth, he's been working. Typing up hashtags, printing shirts. He made three thousand shirts for that march, and then the next one, and now, though there are no more events, he can't stop. Coal in his veins, a thing existing in order to burn. Too many names that need printing, too many stories begging for fabric and paint. #SANDRABLAND. He thinks of his sister, whose car always breaks down. #KORRYNGAINES. His mother, at home alone. #AIYANAJONES. Not his daughter. Not his daughter. He prints until his skin rubs raw against the wooden squeegee, until his palms crack open and his eyes slip shut and his body curls into itself. Cars hurtling down the highway. Crickets at the window like humans, crying for safety.

His boss hauls out six cardboard boxes, stacks them up like a police barricade and crosses his arms. "Ángel. We need to talk."

No, the shirts weren't made for pre-existing orders. No, he didn't ask permission to print the shirts. No, he doesn't have money to pay for them. No, he has nothing to say.

His boss pulls out one after another, like a crazed mother looking for proof of her child's delinquency. "Hashtag Janet Wilson. Hashtag Keith Scott. Look, Ángel. Look, buddy. I agree with you. I'm on your team. But we're talking *six hundred unordered shirts*. You bringing down the system? You overthrowing the government? 'Cause I'll tell you where you're headed, man. I make one call, you're headed straight back where you came from."

Ángel never finds out if he means jail or Puerto Rico. His boss tears up his last two weeks' check and sends him home. He understands he should be grateful.

His mother is incredulous. "Now what will you do? Sit on the couch? How can this be, Ángel, with your talent and your skills?"

He'd planned to give her a hundred dollars, the same way he does every week. Instead, in the face of her disappointment, he gives her six hundred and fifty. His last two hundred he gives to his daughter's mother. His pockets are empty.

But he's home to oversee Manhunt, setting cones at the end of the block to stop traffic and sending kids inside when the streetlights come on. He's home to help his daughter learn to write her name. MARIÁNGEL. The accent is important, he tells her. Don't let your teacher forget it. It's like the sun, falling through the middle of the word.

She doesn't like it, she confesses. Her mom's phone underlines it in red; "that means it's spelled wrong. My name is spelled wrong."

He writes his own name for her. He adds the accent. "Look, reina. It's right there, the sun, shining."

He is home, too, to hear the domestic disputes, the police raids, the fifteen-year-old killed over a basketball game. And he's home to see the gunshots nearly every morning on Fox 29. Over and over, an endless reel.

His mother doesn't serve him dinner. She's tired, she says. He eats hot dogs, pretzels, canned pears. His parole officer, believing he's still employed, congratulates him: eight months free. There is lead in his shoulders and his neck, lead in his spine, lead driving his bones into the sofa cushions, pulling his body toward the

ground. If there is one thing he does not feel, it is free.

Fall turns to winter. He does odd jobs, shovels snow, patches leaking pipes. He tries to do tattoos but his hands shake at unpredictable moments. It's not worth the risk. Besides, even tattoos require tears, RIPs.

How not to try for rebirth, he wonders sometimes, when everywhere, every day, there are so many ways to die?

But his daughter is growing. She has fire-black hair and bright eyes. She can write her first and last name.

In February, on his birthday, she brings him crispy M&Ms and dandelions she pressed in summer, brilliant flat heads tipping into his palm. Examining them, he finds a four-leaf clover, unknowingly harvested and preserved.

At the print shop, one of the T-shirts said: WE ARE THE GRANDDAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHES YOU WEREN'T ABLE TO BURN. He watches his daughter's blazing smile. She is luck, he is sure of it. She is magic. She is victory.

Sometimes when there's a knock on the door, he thinks his time is up, they're coming for him. His parole officer, or the organizers, or the men on his block who are out of a job, or people who want tattoos, or his father and his brother who have been dead for years, or his sister, or his mother, or his daughter. As he gets up from the sofa, he imagines they're standing in the street, chanting his name. Their words collect and swell and break and then they're chanting something else, but he can't understand them, and he can't quiet them the way he used to, with a steady breath and a silent raise of a hand. He's trapped in the entrance. Soon they'll climb the steps, pound, break down the door.

"Ángel, qué te pasa, it's your sister!" his mother says, and his fear crumples and slides, ashamed, to the edges of the room. He rubs his eyes and opens the door.

He has this recurring dream where his phone is ringing. "We're marching," they say when he picks up. "We've shut down 95. We've taken City Hall. Come on, man. You need to be here." But he's printing shirts, a million this time. "Gotta get these done," he says. "Last minute. No one else in the shop, it's got to be me."

"But what are they for? The revolution is now. Leave the shirts. Get down here."

He can't answer, because every time he looks down, the letters blur. He can't read them. But he has to finish. A million shirts to save the world. Black tees, more black tees, more black tees.

Four months since he was fired. The sun sets over rooftops.

Mariángel watches cartoons beside him. "Bye, brujita," he says when her mother picks her up. That's what he calls her now. Little witch. She calls him monster, a playful revenge, though sometimes, when she's sad to leave, she calls him king, rey.

He's been feeling empty. Like his blood has dried up, leaving nothing in his veins. His P.O. is happy: almost one year down. Is this what he's been spared for? Watching the sun go down and up, another couple hours of sleep, another coffee?

"Rey o monstruo?" he asks as she hugs him. "Which am I today?"

"Rey. Y monstruo," she says, her breath sweet, sticky hands cupped at his ear. "You're both, Daddy."

He stares at her, startled, strangely relieved.

When night has fallen and his mother and sister are asleep, he takes his bike out for the first time since fall. He cruises down the

block and onto the highway, all the way to his old exit, the dark parking lot. He rummages in the trashcan for the spare key.

The designs only take a little time. He could write these letters in his sleep.

There are two thousand black tees in stock. Then white tees, five hundred, white on white, impossible to read. It doesn't matter. #ÁNGEL, he prints. #ÁNGEL. #ÁNGEL. After a while, he switches to the second design. #DIABLO. #DIABLO. #DIABLO.

He's thirsty. The clock ticks toward one, two, three.

He leaves the shirts everywhere. In boxes, on the floor, stacked ten and twenty to a pile. Some dried, some sticky. The bottoms of his shoes soaked white. The floors, the desk. They'll find them here. Enough to plaster the world at its seams.

He gets back on his bike. Merging onto the highway, he pumps the engine to a hundred, a hundred ten, a hundred twenty. Hair flattened to his scalp. Tears flying. Each second a scorching celebration: alive! alive! alive! Faster and harder than his life has ever permitted, past his exit, past this city. As bold and as brilliant as the world is not ready, burning at his very core, at his epicenter, finally.

Sara Graybeal is a writer, performer and teaching artist living in Greensboro, NC. She co-founded the Poeticians, a spoken word and hip-hop collective based in Point Breeze, Philadelphia. Her writing has been published in Moon City Review, Floating Bridge Review, Sixfold and Tempered Magazine, among others, and her poem "Point Breeze, 2015" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



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Home-Made Gods

Poem by Claire Scott

Why not
create gods that work better for us
no gods requiring two sets of dishes
or prayers five times a day knees-in-agony O Lord
maybe not gods who talk of turning a cheek
or promise happiness in some tenuous heaven

come Tuesday, bring clay or fabric, easels,
buttons, paint, scissors, paper, old magazines
let's each make her own god or goddess
mine a marionette with gossamer wings
pale blue eyes and a lacquered smile
more capable than Siri or Alexa

mine obeys every flick of my finger
whips up a chalet in France or a sleek Ferrari
collapses quietly in the corner when not needed
expects no penance or confession
no tithing or coins pinging a collection plate

some strings attached

Made Up Saints

Poem by Claire Scott

I weep at cartoons.
Wile E. Coyote free-falling from a cliff,
Sylvester flattened by an iron safe,
scads of sodden Kleenex at my side.

I put my name on a wait list for mercy
(a light-year long).
I murmur worn mantras,
send prayers to made-up saints:

Saint Jackson of bankruptcy,
Saint Sophia of clogged toilets,
Saint Lester of shapeless days
& tedious tomorrows.

Someone else dreams my dreams at night.
I toss on sweat-stained sheets.

Am I missing the point
or was it never there?
A diver yanks a rope,
a wrestler taps out,
I tip over my King.
Checkmate.



Claire Scott is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has been accepted by the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Enizagam* and *Healing Muse* among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.



Field Study

Poem by Charles S. Carr

1.

E A G L E S written in vapors in the sky
A dalliance of eagles overhead
Midair clasp talons cart-wheeling down toward earth
Chant of boos at the site of the purple-winged god of the north wind,

2.

A procession of green double decker buses carrying the champs moves slowly up Broad Street
A rage of joy screams people barricaded swarm the parade route,
bearded player wearing a turban and Mummers costume dives into the crowd
floats on raised arms

3.

A few clutch urns of ancestral ashes
Man wearing a jersey with number 99
circles in a ghost dance
empties ashes on the edges of a park at Broad & Oregon

4.

Elderly couple wearing fated team caps holds a sign
 58 Years! The Curse Is Gone!
Wings on everything
Every shade of green expressing loyalty to the Champions
The reflective glory on the back of jerseys: names numbers of their heroes
The face of Nick Foles taped over the image of a saint

5.

Two giant marble pylons open out to the Parkway to a roaring sea
Boys huddled together standing on the shoulders of the sculpted soldiers
on the Civil War Memorial
A cap placed on the head of *The Thinker* at the Rodin Museum
A ski cap on the head of George Washington at Eakin's Oval, a boy riding side saddle
Beer bottles stuck in branches decorate a tree in front of the Barnes

6.

Go-go dancer swivels up a light pole spins with an outstretched hand to the crowd
Two young men mud wrestle
Another body surfs through another mud patch
Cans of beer hurled at pole climbers
Finally one reaches the summit, guzzles a beer, directs the chorus below
in *Fly Eagles Fly*



Charles Carr was born in Philadelphia, educated at LaSalle and Bryn Mawr College, and has lived here his whole life. Charles was The Mad Poets Review's 2007 First Prize Winner for his poem "Waiting To Come North" and has two published books of poetry: *paradise, pennsylvania*, (Cradle Press, 2009) and *Haitian Mudpies & Other Poems* (Moonstone Arts, 2012). For five years, Charles hosted the Moonstone Poetry series at Fergie's Pub. Since 2016, he has hosted Philly Loves Poetry a monthly broadcast on Philly Cam. He has read poems in the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin, Ireland as part of the international project, 100 Thousand Poets For Peace.



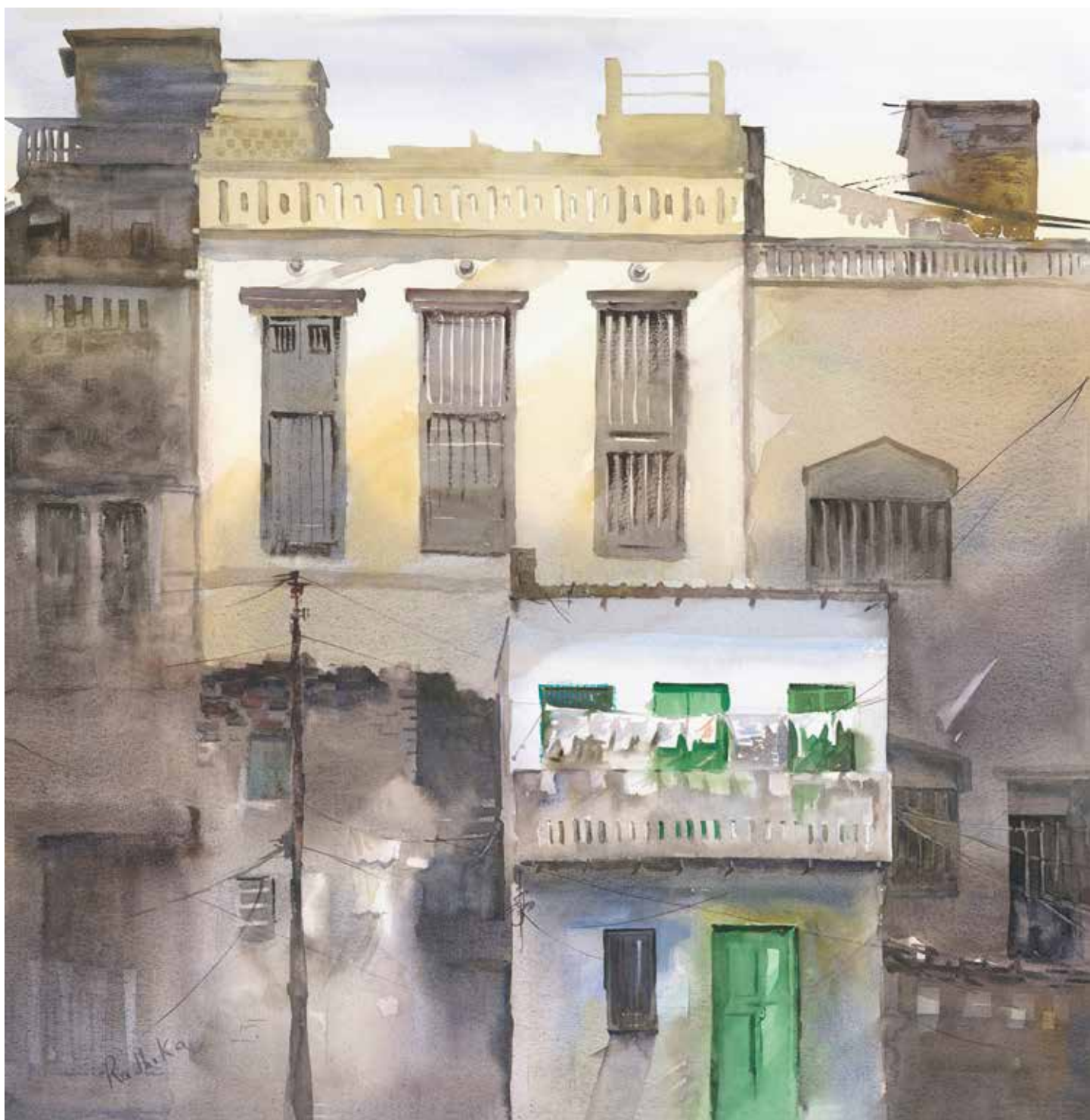
Evensong, King's College Chapel

Poem by Peter McEllhenney

Our days are longer than glass, longer than
Stone, longer than light and air, longer than
The waters of this softly flowing river that will
Pass, rise, fall, and pass again while we speak
These words, sing these words. Our days are
Longer than prayer or scholarship, than ambition
Or boasting or riot or sleeping or waking or food
Or kisses or the bright exalting summer of youth.
They are longer than sorrow or rejoicing or love
Or bones turned to powder. Our steps trace and
Retrace the paths of echoing generations, and
We are indistinguishable among them. For a
Thousand years has the black-haired girl sat in
Choir and stared black-eyed, and for a thousand
More will she sit and stare. We will speak these
Words, sing these words. For centuries the man
Has sat dry in his faith, and for centuries more
Will he sit. We will speak these words, sing these
Words. The dry man will find his faith and the
Black-eyed girl will look up. We have no need
For rushing. With our words and our singing
We make this glass and this stone the great
Still center of creation. The long grass moves
From the breath of our words. The trailing
Willows sway from the breath of our singing.
The river flows softly while we speak and we
Sing. These words and this singing pass from
Mouth to mouth and their living is continuous.
We do not matter at all. Our broken ineluctable
Particulars are translated into these words and
This singing, and we are made whole by them.
When the windows are blank cold darkness we
Speak. When the stones glow skin warm we sing.
There is confidence in our words and endurance
In our singing. The softly flowing river passes.
We speak and we sing.



Peter McEllhenney is a writer living in Philadelphia, PA. His work has appeared in *Philadelphia Stories*, the *Seminary Ridge Review*, *Referential Magazine*, *The Apeiron Review*, and *Blast Furnace*. He blogs at www.PeterGalenMassey.com.





CUT AND DRY

Amanda Auble

I'm not even halfway out the door when one of my girls starts screaming at me over the sound of her hair dryer. I don't care about her date with her boyfriend; she can close down the salon for one night this week. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, you'd think I'd asked her to jump off the Walt Whitman Bridge. I don't ask them for much, but when I do, I expect my girls to be sharp.

"Gina, this ain't fair," she says to me. "Since when is it my job to lock up? Where do you need to be all of a sudden?" She looks like she's going to have a stroke with her vein popping out of her head like that. She's as red as a tomato.

I tell her, I say, "If you keep getting this riled up, you won't need to wear any more blush." She's around my daughter's age, and they're all too young to be wearing so much makeup – the contouring, the smoky eye, the bright lipstick. By the time they're eighteen, they've learned how to hide every flaw. But have they learned how to write a check or do their taxes? I mean, I'm not shy to pile the eye shadow on myself, but I'm pushing fifty. The bags under my eyes can carry more than my purse. I've got my own tricks to keep up appearances: layers of concealer, gallons of hair dye, and hours in the mirror every morning. They don't need all that hassle at their age.

If this girl, Lisa, wasn't one of the best hairstylists in South Philly, her attitude would've gotten her kicked out of my shop a while ago. I've owned Bella Luna Salon for almost ten years now. It isn't big, but every inch of it's mine, from the sleek shampooing stations to the hair dryers to the neon signs out front. Sometimes, I have to remind her that she works on my schedule not her boyfriend's. The sooner she learns that the better. She's a headache, but I have to remember I was that age once too. Besides, she can work wonders with hair. She can fix a part that's as crooked as Passyunk Ave.

I'm not going to answer her question and broadcast my real business to everybody in the shop, so I lie. "If you have to know, it's my friend Rita's birthday. She lives out in Jersey. Happy?"

Poor Mrs. Pizzelle has to sit there the whole time and listen to me scream at this girl. I need to send that woman a thank-you card or a gift certificate or both. She's a regular at the salon – schedules her hair appointment on Sundays after mass. She always says, "I have my church, but your salon is my retreat." Ain't that nice? She gets to brag all day about her family while I rinse her hair.

Before Lisa and I started this screaming match, Mrs. Pizzelle was telling me that her youngest boy, Joey, got into law school.

"Tell him divorce court is where all the money's at. They say over half of marriages fail nowadays. You can't beat those odds," I said. "I'm walking proof."

I'm always chatty when I cut hair, but she doesn't like when I bring up my divorce. I couldn't help myself. She didn't say anything, of course, she just changed the subject like always. I felt her shoulders tense when I snipped the dead ends of her hair.

Just so I can stop the chaos in the salon, I say to Lisa, "If you can't handle it, I'm sure Dawn can always take over your appointments." That fact shuts her up real quick. Dawn's a sweet girl, but everybody knows the damage she can do to hair. Instead of auburn, the girl dyed Marta Caputo's hair bright orange. Lisa just grinds her teeth, and gets back to drying Mrs. Lombardi's curls. I'm still not sure why I keep Dawn around. Mostly, I think, it's to shut Lisa up at times like this.

It's quiet once I slam the salon door behind me, but I don't get any relief. It's so hot in the city today. All the families must've gone packing for one last trip down the shore. I'm already sweating from running around all day. Sure, the hair dryers don't help, but I blame our chatter for spreading around even more hot air. My hair has frizzed enough already. I wish I was really meeting Rita. Now, I have to worry about having a sit down with my ex-husband, Ray, with this mop top.

I haven't told the girls who work for me yet that I let Ray sleep on my couch last night. They have no clue, which is crazy because usually I can't shut up about him. Forget installing TV's in the salon, my life is the soap opera. They know all about the cheating, the missed child support, the new girlfriends. They don't know that Ray showed up desperate on my doorstep yesterday.

After working in heels all day, it wasn't easy to stand in my doorway and watch him find the words. He said, "Gina, I know we have our issues, but hear me out." Issues? Ray and I have got the whole subscription.

I was twenty-one when I got pregnant with Maria. That was that. Ray and I were getting married and fast. There was no time to work anything out besides table settings. God forbid I waddled down the aisle of St. Catherine's with any kind of a belly. The whole neighborhood might have a collective heart attack.

I should've realized Ray was cheating on me. I blamed it on the little things: his job working for his father, my time away at cosmetology school, starting the salon, the pregnancy. After I had the baby, he used to say that my thighs looked like coffee cake. I knew he wasn't serious, but I'd run my hands along the fat on my



legs. I should've smelled the perfume or found the stray hairs, but I didn't want to. Instead, he just sat me down one morning and told me all about this new girlfriend. This new "love" he said. I could've thrown the entire bathroom sink at him. I'm glad I didn't. He wasn't worth nearly as much as all my beauty supplies.

We both got lawyers and set court dates. I got to keep Maria and our shitty house on Eighth Street in the divorce. From day one, I wanted to keep him in my life. I couldn't picture it without him. I thought it'd be good for Maria too.

Ray was a good father at first. I'd catch him lying on the floor with her on his chest, both of them out cold, Big Bird still yapping on the TV. But he's been in and out of her life since then. Now, she's off at college. She's almost nineteen years old, but when she's with him, she acts like a little kid who doesn't want to scare away a butterfly that's landed on her finger.

And Ray still had the guts to ask me to crash on the couch. He ran his father's sheet metal business into the ground and his latest girl kicked him out of the apartment.

He still looked good though, and I hated it. Why does he get to be fine wine and I'm last night's leftovers? First, I told him go find a hotel. But he leaned in and looked at me with those big brown eyes.

"Please, Gina, I've got nowhere else to go," he said. "It'll just be one night. I promise I'll stay out of your hair." So, I caved. He hugged me. I crumbled like a coffee cake.

Sure, I've dated here and there since Ray. There are lots of great guys out there, and a few have made their way into my life. But I've changed since the divorce. I cut my hair short now. I tease it out for volume so it barely touches my shoulders. It's dyed bright blond. Ray says I look like a mad scientist, but I don't care.

It's loud and obnoxious. I think it fits me.

Ray was my biggest crush in high school. Forget my posters of David Cassidy and Bobby Sherman. I used to make Rita drive past his house on Friday nights. She lived right next door to me and her older brother would lend her his beat-up convertible. We'd have our own stakeouts. I'd wait to see which party Ray went to that night.

He always dressed so well. No jeans and sneakers like the other neighborhood boys. He wore button-downs and snuck into the discos. He was a couple years older too. His brown hair was long and feathered and perfect. He looked good and he knew it. He'd have a different date almost every week. They'd walk off into the night together to go dancing. God, someone should've called the cops on us for all that stalking we did. Well, someone should have arrested me. Poor Rita was just my getaway driver.

I officially met Ray at Pete DiPalma's eighteenth birthday. I made Rita drive us after getting ready at her house. She was hopeless with makeup, almost stabbing her eyes out with that eyeliner pencil before giving up. Rita never felt like impressing anybody. If she could, she'd just wear her school uniform everywhere. Book smarts: that was more Rita's thing. So, like usual, I took over. I gave her big Cleopatra eyes just so we could get out the door.

Of course, I knew Ray and his friends would be there. Why else would we go? Why did I do anything in high school if it wasn't to get Ray's attention? That was back when I straightened my curly, brown hair on an ironing board every night. I knew that's how he liked it. All the girls he dated had straight hair. I must have looked like a cocker spaniel. I probably had the puppy-dog eyes

to match. But the heat damage and burns to my scalp were all worth it the second he looked at me.

I did everything like the magazines told you. Look hard to get, but not uninterested. Before I knew it, we were chatting and he was putting his hand on my waist. My heels dug into the shag carpet. He made fun of my earrings, but only so he could touch them. I had to give Rita the slip so he could walk me home that night. But after Ray kissed me goodbye, I wouldn't hear any of it. My face must have been bright red. I could feel it burning even when his lips were gone.

I still have our prom photos in an old shoebox somewhere. Boy, that was some updo I concocted that night. Ray said he'd never seen hair so big. We danced for hours and the sweat deflated it all. That's when he started calling me "mop top." Ray took me dancing almost every night. I was much shorter, but I wore platform shoes so we could be perfect partners. I'd invite him over for dinner. My mother made him ravioli, and he made her laugh till she cried. Sure, everyone said Ray never stayed with one girl for too long, but it was my turn. I wasn't going to give him up so easy. I knew how he operated. I let him go out with his friends just as long as he came back to me. Even though the rumors started to swirl, I made it work. I used to call up Rita to update her on his record.

She'd probably crack up if she heard this news. She'd love to know how desperate Ray is now. I almost wanted to call her up, but things have changed. She stopped watching "The Ray and Gina Show" a while ago. She got a job as a travel agent and got out of South Philly. She lives out in Cherry Hill now with three kids. Can you believe it? I always knew she'd leave the neighborhood, but I never wanted it to happen. I lost my partner in crime. I'm the godmother to one of her kids, but I'm lucky if I get to see her once a year.

When I get back to the house, Ray's watching TV. I toss my keys onto the kitchen counter and start boiling water for whatever pasta I decide to make tonight. Cooking always calms me down. It reminds me of when Maria still lived at home and I made thirty-minute meals every night – when it was just the two of us.

Ray hears me and jumps up from the couch like lightning. He always said I make too much noise. The bracelets, the heels, the key chains, and now the pots and pans. Everything I buy is too gaudy, he says. Like his shiny shoes and big belt buckles are so classy. I expect him to mouth-off one of these same old complaints, but he sweet-talks me.

"How are the girls at the shop?" he asks.

"As crazy as always, but they get it done," I say. I want to open a jar of sauce to get it heating in a pan, but the lid is too tight. Ray says he's got it, takes it from me, and pops the top off without so much as a grunt.

"You always knew how to keep it together. You run a tight ship," he says, handing it over. I turn back to the stove. I can feel his eyes on me. I know he wants me to turn around to face him. Maybe give him a chance to explain himself. When I don't, he goes for the silverware drawer. He actually starts setting the table. I haven't seen him do that in years. I don't know what he's doing. By the way he lays out the napkins, I don't think he knows either. When he's finished, he sits at his old seat at the table. He always liked that spot because it had the perfect angle so he could watch TV and eat. God forbid we ever had a real conversation. He'd just sit there silent, splashing more sauce than the baby.

"How's Maria liking college?" he asks while I put the bowl of pasta down between us.

"So far so good. Thinks chemistry's going to be a lot of work." I say it all the time, but I don't know where Maria got the brains. I tell her there's nothing under my hair but air. She definitely didn't get her smarts from Ray. He barely passed high school so his idea of college is *Animal House*.

"I've been meaning to call her," he says, piling the pasta onto his plate. "Never got to give her my big college talk." He smiles and waits for me to bite.

"Oh yeah?" I can't help but be interested in whatever tough-guy advice he's concocted now. "Let's hear it."

"Well I want her to stay focused, ya know? College has a lot of distractions." He scrunches up his eyebrows like he's trying to act like some college professor. "These boys they all want the same thing. I know what an idiot I was at that age." He looks down at his plate and rubs the back of his neck.

"I'd say you were more of a jerk." I smile and pass him some more sauce.

"I deserve that," he laughs. We both pick at our pasta without really eating. "But seriously," he starts up again, "now that she's on her own, I want her to be careful. You know all that makeup she wears? She doesn't need so much. All those boys will think, well, you know, that she's easy." He whispers the last word like it didn't come straight from his own mouth. Jesus Christ, he'd love it if she just became a nun like the ones who smacked his hands in Catholic school. He has no idea that she's already had a boyfriend. That he was a nice boy. That I never let her go anywhere near his house until she finished her homework. But she doesn't tell her father all that. Why should she?

"You know she learned it herself. You don't think she looks nice? You don't think she knows what she's doing?"

"Of course I trust her. I just don't want her to send out the wrong signals. Give the wrong impression." I give him one loud laugh, shake my head, and keep poking at my pasta. "Look I didn't mean for you to get all upset," he says. "I'm a worried parent just like you."

I can't stomach this meal anymore. I put my plate in the sink and go off to my room.

After a while, I hear Ray doing the dishes. I hadn't bothered with them myself. I usually just leave them soaking for too long. I'd rather run through all my silverware before I empty the sink.

When he's done, I hear him walk into my dim bedroom. He doesn't turn on the light. He just lays down beside me. I turn my back to him. I don't want to be the first to apologize. Why should I? For a while, neither of us says a word. No loud noises. No yelling like we want to wake the neighbors. I just listen to his breathing and try to remember the last time my bed wasn't empty. When he starts to rub my back, I don't stop him. His hands don't feel different, but they feel heavy. He pulls me close and says he's sorry.

"Remember your long, brown hair?" he asks me as I turn over. He looks into my eyes like he's trying to look into the past. He smiles and says to me, "You always looked so good." He looked at me like we were kids again. I can't lie. I wanted to let it all go, to have it all back for a second. I'd let him stay. He could run his fingers through my hair and spin me around like we were back on the dance floor.

When I came into work this morning, I had to look at myself in the mirrors that cover almost every wall. I didn't have time to re-apply my makeup so I look like one of those sad clowns. Even with all the hairspray, I still have bed head. The girls already opened up shop and are busy on the first morning customers. Dawn has Annette with her head in the sink. Lisa snips away at Mrs. Tomasi's bob. I should really hire another stylist, but I'm not sure I can afford it now. I'll have to check the books later tonight. I think the shelves also need restocking. I can do that too while I'm at it. Lisa pulls me aside and offers me one of the cannolis she bought from the bakery down the street.

"I know I gave you attitude yesterday. I want to make up for it," she says. I tell her not to sweat it and grab one for my breakfast. I didn't have time for my usual Starbucks run either, so before operating any heavy machinery, I decide to make a pot of coffee. I'm not even done pouring the water when I hear another customer come inside.

"Good morning, ladies. It's been a while," Ray says. I almost drop the pot and shatter glass everywhere. My heart goes into my throat. It's like I swallowed that cannoli whole. Ray hasn't stepped foot in my shop since before the renovations – back when it was an old laundromat.

"I thought I'd stop by to get a little trim. What do you think, ladies? I look like a hippie, right?" All the typical commotion in the shop stops. Dawn has to remember to turn off the sink so water doesn't run all over the floor. All eyes fall on me. Ray grabs my waist and gives me a quick kiss. The girls must be in more shock than I am.

"Take a seat," I say, pulling away as fast as I can. I'm usually a natural in heels, but I can barely make my way over to my station to grab my scissors.

"It's just a trim, but I understand if this is a little awkward," he says. "I'm sure I can get one of these lovely ladies to get the job done." He scans Lisa up and down. "What's your name, sweet heart?"

I spin his chair around before any of the girls have a chance to talk, so it's just Ray and me staring at each other in the mirror.

"This place really looks great, Gina," he says. I can't remember how many times I begged Ray to visit me at work. I always wanted him to see that all my time away had paid off. But now I feel sick. I have to resist this urge to shave his whole head with the electric trimmer.

Instead, I just wet his hair and start cutting. I move the comb across his scalp. I expect it to all feel the same, but it's thinner than I remember. He talks about things while he waits – about his plans and about our future. In the shop's lighting, I can see more of his gray hairs. But I can't see us staying together. This is what happens when I let myself lose control. This is the first time in over ten years that I've kept my mouth shut during a trim. I just keep cutting. I cut until there's barely any hair left. I didn't mean to, but I give him a crew cut like they do before they send guys off to the army. It makes him look older, which I never thought was possible.

"I guess I'll see you for another dinner later," he says when I take off his apron. The girls have all gotten back to their routine. The regular rhythm picks up again around the shop. Ray goes to kiss my cheek, but I cut him short.

"I'm going to have to close down the shop tonight," I tell him, "and I need the house empty when I get home." I don't even sound like myself. If this was anyone else I'd be screaming at the

top of my lungs. I just stare at him. I didn't shout it, but he knew I meant it.

He doesn't say anything at first. He just rubs his forehead like he's trying to iron out all the wrinkles. I had given him every reason to think we were fine.

"Is it the hair?" he asks, trying to laugh. Those big brown eyes look up at me for one last chance.

"No, I love the hair," I say. That was never the problem. I look around at the girls working on a few customers. I tell him maybe I'll call him and we can talk later. He loses his smile after that. That wasn't what he wanted to hear. He looks around the shop like he's never seen it before. Like he's walked into some trap.

"Real nice, Gina." He shakes his head at me. He asks me if this is how I treat people. If this is how I operate. How does anybody ever have a chance with me? He says I have a problem. He even says he'll say a prayer for me. Anybody else would say that he turned into a completely different person.

At this point, all the girls are looking at me to make the call. They're waiting for me to let them off the leash so they can say something to this guy. I just follow Ray to the door. I hold it open for him on his way out. He doesn't say goodbye. He just strides down the sidewalk going God knows where. All I know is that it's even hotter outside today. When the door closes behind me, I feel my hair frizz and the heat vanish.

Amanda recently graduated from Johns Hopkins University with degrees in English and Writing Seminars. She currently lives in Southern New Jersey where she grew up going to beach and swimming in the ocean. Along with writing for local newspapers, Amanda works as an ocean lifeguard. She has always felt a strong connection to her hometown and a desire to share its stories.



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Trail of Ghosts

Devon James

When I was a junior in high school, I got a job at a flower shop. I worked there for almost five years, scraping money together for SATs and prom dresses. On the weekends I roamed South Jersey roadways and highways in the shop vans. Both vans, big or little, had filthy cupholders full of pennies, center consoles stuffed with fast food trash and business cards, broken starters, funky brakes, and were my chosen form of escaping home.

Being on the road was addictive. The vans were high above the pavement, where the echoes of my father's death, the debt he left my family, and its strain on my mother, couldn't reach me. I was secure in the way roller coasters feel secure when you're strapped in, just before the drop.

Big Bertha was my favorite van. From its height, I could see down into any car below. Maybe it was the feeling of control or maybe it was the feeling of breathlessness, that as high as I was, as far as I was from my problems below, I was still moving. As a restless teenager, this was a peaceful feeling.

The first time I drove Bertha was a few weeks after I got my license. I was 17. I grabbed the key from the shop and trekked across the street towards the parking lot. I didn't think I could handle a vehicle of her size, even if only to drive her across the street to the shop-front. I was used to smaller vehicles, and looking into other drivers' eyes, not the tops of their heads. Climbing upwards to reach the driver's seat was new territory for me. The seat was so far from the pedals I had to sit on the edge of the cushion to reach both gas and brakes. It would be months before I learned to move the seat forward.

The next time I drove her was also my first time delivering funeral flowers. I knew the location well. It was where my father's funeral was held ten or so years prior. My boss did the flowers for my father's service too, which meant they were delivered in the same van, Big Bertha.

I pulled into the driveway, set far back from the road by a hill jutting awkwardly above the street below. I braced myself for the flashbacks to come: four vases with a blue flower to represent my brothers, one vase with a pink flower for me. My mother crying. Sitting in the front row, the cremated remains of a former half of me resting in a box at the front of the room.

Before I entered the funeral home, I sat in the van, counting off arrangements, matching flowers to delivery slips, making sure none were forgotten.

I opened the side door, arms full with a funeral basket so

large I couldn't see over it. I watched my feet, making sure to avoid tripping on any steps and destroying the flowers of mourning. After setting the arrangement down, I stood up to find myself facing the casket.

It was open and the corpse inside looked puffy and waxen. I averted my eyes though they kept gravitating towards his body. I couldn't look at him, yet I couldn't look away. His gray hair was slicked back perfectly atop his balding head. Years of living well had carved smile lines deep into his skin. His mouth had permanently set into a smirk.

Soon, I would learn how common it is to see
corpses in the flower industry, how often it is
not the flowers of the living, but rather
casket decorations and peace lilies.

I shifted my focus and found the carpet and wallpaper matched that of my memories. Dark floral patterns on the walls clashed, or perhaps meshed, with the deep green of the carpet. Behind me, the rows of chairs matched my memory too. I turned to see the chair I sat in the last time I was in the room, fifth from the left, front row.

My mother had been seated closest to the wall, first in line to receive guests, my brothers and I following her, positioned chronologically. Before us, instead of a coffin stood a table bearing the box of my father's ashes, and the five tiny vases.

Everyone had worn black as they huddled around pictures of a man no one would see again. I had smiled at them, awkwardly attempting to offer joy, failing entirely in that attempt.

That day ushered in an era of silence, of quiet tears spilt alone late at night. I don't remember much of what happened immediately afterwards. My mom finally finished the kitchen renovation they'd begun long ago. We went to Florida for our first vacation without our father. Eventually, money became tighter. My brothers and I became closer, conscious then of the ease at which a person goes from being there, to never being anywhere

other than in the past tense. We were deeply connected to my mom too. As a unit, we spent no time looking back.

Maybe it had been too easy to walk out of that room. Maybe I had never really left it.

I left and came back with more flowers. Trip after trip, van to funeral home and back again, until finally it was over. I brought the final arrangement in and set it gently on the carpet in front of the casket. I looked at the silent and peaceful man and wondered how he would feel if he knew I was looking at him. I imagined his laughter and his hugs during the stories he would tell his grandchildren during the holidays.

I ran from the room without shutting the door. Bertha started on the first turn in the ignition, a rare feat, and I drove off so quickly I almost tipped her on her side.

Away from the room and the man and the memories, I wanted to go back to sit with him for a while but I had other deliveries to make. Birthday balloons, bridal flowers, "I'm Sorry" bouquets awaited.

Soon, I would learn how common it is to see corpses in the flower industry, how often it is not the flowers of the living, but rather casket decorations and peace lilies. How, more often than not, I would carry flowers whose recipients are in the process of being forgotten: silent arrangements, ones no one calls the sender about, as opposed to the flowers of the living.

In the hours before the services would begin, funeral home directors accepted the flower deliveries. After a while, these deliveries became quiet, peaceful places for me to be with the dead. Knowing I was one of the last people to share their private time with them, I began reading the obituaries, not just glancing

at delivery dates and times, to glimpse who they were: veterans, nurses, teachers, students. I could learn how they died based on the wording, *Passed Suddenly* usually meant overdose or suicide, while *Is Now At Peace* usually translated into cancer or some other illness.

They were sometimes young, oftentimes old, and their loved ones were always listed at the end of the obituary. There, I learned how these people lived and who they left behind. People who were losing life partners, children, grandparents, mothers, and fathers. Then I would bring in the flowers ordered by those loved ones, and set them at the base of the caskets.

Quick and clean, in and out, bouncing around South Jersey, leaving a trail of ghosts behind, I'd strap myself into the safety of the van after each delivery. I'd blast NPR, or music, or both as I drove.

At the end of the night, I would park the van at the shop, hang the keys on the wall, then lock the door and leave, forgetting the names of the bodies I'd seen that day. I would trade their faces for those of the living and abandon the dead until my next shift.

I still notice when I'm near one of the funeral homes I used to deliver to. The familiarity of the routes have ingrained into my subconscious, next to the wallpaper patterns and obituaries, and ghosts of those whose funerals I'd crashed.

Author Bio: Devon James is pursuing an accelerated BA/MA in Writing Arts and Writing respectively from Rowan University in Glassboro New Jersey. She grew up in Southern New Jersey where she spent time exploring the surrounding area's diverse landscape. From forests to farms to Philadelphia, she is grateful to have grown up in an area with such unique offerings. When she is not writing, she enjoys hiking, needlework, and tending to her many plants.

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David Borgenicht, Founder, Quirk Books, discusses How to Discover the Next Big Thing in Book Publishing at the Writers at Work conference.



Poetry & Medicine panel with Irène Mathieu, Trapeta Mayson, & Wynne Morrison at the LitLife Poetry Conference.



Writers at Work panel includes Schiffer Books Jamie Elfrank, Runnig Press's Cassie Drumm, and Newbery-award winning author, Erin Entrada Kelly (all graduates of Rosemont's MFA program).



The Writing Prompt

Aimee LaBrie

A little known fact, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* was inspired by a writing prompt suggested during his Thursday evening writing group at the Moscow library. The prompt: "write a story that ends with a suicide via railway. Make vocab twelfth grade reading level and use numerous flashbacks, a minimum of one blizzard, and two characters with names ending in 'nina.'"

I confess a certain snobby, literary disdain for the idea of writing prompts, as if a real writer wouldn't need manufactured inspiration from the exercise section of a how-to writing book. A **real** writer wouldn't enter the annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction contest for worst first sentence similar to "it was a dark and stormy night." And yet, the truth is that I've had personal success using writing prompts. One of my grad classes at Penn required us to write a story in the form of an advice column. My story (and others) found publication in volume based on this idea (*Prompted*). Without that very specific nudge, I never would have written the piece, or probably even conceived of the format.

I've also found that when I teach writing, students often respond with creative work that dazzles based on some basic constraints (examples: giving students a startling first line of dialogue, asking them to base a story on a single painting, writing exercises that start with "I remember the first time I..."). Most students seem to thrive on some level of prompting, rather than facing an entirely blank page and carte blanche to write whatever they want.

My hesitation to suggest that you use writing prompts to get started comes from some bad writing prompts I've seen. This one, for example: "Suddenly, she discovered..." To me, that prompt sets the writer up for a fatal first sentence that places the climax at the beginning of the story, rather than near the end. It also sets the writer up for some bad first ideas. "Suddenly, she discovered she was a dog. Suddenly, she discovered, she was on Mars. Suddenly, she discovered she didn't want to marry Bob." And yet...One of my favorite short stories by Amy Bloom, "Love is Not a Pie" begins very similarly: "In the middle of the eulogy at my mother's boring and heartbreaking funeral, I began to think about calling off the wedding. August 21 did not seem like a good date, John Wescott did not seem like a good person to marry, and I couldn't see myself in the long white silk gown Mrs. Wescott had offered me."

In addition, there are a number of writing contests that use writing prompts/constraints as formats for submissions. NPR used to do an excellent fiction contest called "Three Minute Fiction" that would give writers a first line to start with, and the constraint that you had to tell a complete story in under 600 words

(something that can be read in under three minutes). I never won any of those contests, but I tried them every time. There's a recent contest by Owl Canyon Press that dictates the first and last paragraph of a story, asking the writer to fill in the 48 paragraphs in between to create the story. I started that challenge on a day when my brain wasn't giving me much else, and the trickiness of trying to weave in the first details with the last details in mind felt exhilarating, like figuring out a difficult crossword puzzle. In the meantime, a story started to take shape and I was able to get my word count done for the day. They are out there, those rogue writing prompts, and they are often associated with other constraints, including a deadline to finish.

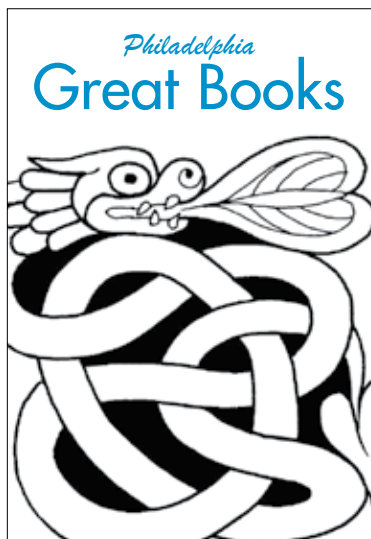
There is a part of me that still resists this idea of prompts because it feels like I'm cheating somehow by not coming up with my own fuel. But the truth is, it's sometimes hard to jump-start the creative mind, and so anything that moves you forward---first lines, last lines, deadlines---has value. The goal each day is to put words on the page, and so I suggest that if you, like Tolstoy, find you're getting the work done by starting with "Suddenly, she found herself on the train tracks..." then by all means, jump in.

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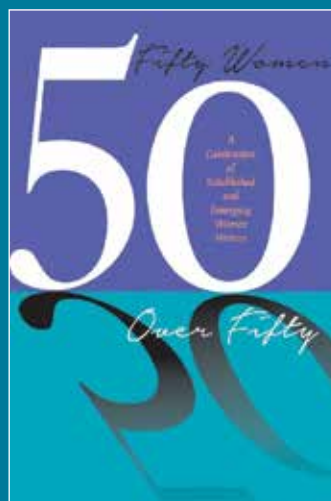
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☐ Michener (\$30-\$49) ☐ Potok (\$500-\$999) ☐ Buck (\$50-\$99)
☐ W. C. Williams (\$1,000+) ☐ Whitman (\$100-\$499) ☐ Other _____

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